

Lexington's program to Increase Asian Residents' Civic Participation has been recognized as a 2015 Harvard Ash Center Bright Idea in Government

Lexington, MA – February 18, 2015 – The Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, today recognized the Town of Lexington's program to Increase Asian Residents' Civic Participation as part of the 2015 Bright Ideas program. This year's cohort includes 124 programs from all levels of government—school districts; county, city, state, and federal agencies; as well as public-private partnerships—that are at the forefront in innovative government action.

Town leaders wanted to understand the issues raised by demographic changes, particularly the dramatic increase in the percentage of residents of Asian origin and their low participation in local government. Lexington's 20/20 Vision Committee chartered a Subcommittee on Demographic Change to identify real or perceived barriers preventing participation of Lexington's Asian residents on Town boards and committees, and to suggest steps that would lower these barriers. Their report, which was widely publicized throughout the community, can be found on the [Town's website](#). Since then, a greater number of Asian-Americans have enrolled in the annual Citizens' Academy, run for elected office, and been appointed to committees. These numbers are expected to increase as continued discussion results in a clearer understanding of the ways volunteers can participate in local government.

"The Bright Ideas program demonstrates that often seemingly intractable problems can be creatively and capably tackled by small groups of dedicated, civic-minded individuals," said Stephen Goldsmith, director of the Innovations in Government Program at the Ash Center. "As exemplified by this year's Bright Ideas, making government work better doesn't always require massive reforms and huge budgets. Indeed, we are seeing that, in many ways, an emphasis on efficiency and adaptability can have further-reaching effects than large-scale reforms."

This is the fourth cohort recognized through the Bright Ideas program, an initiative of the broader Innovations in American Government Awards program. For consideration as a Bright Idea, programs must currently be in operation or in the process of launching and have sufficient operational resources and must be administered by one or more governmental entities; nonprofit, private sector, and union initiatives are eligible if operating in partnership with a governmental organization. Bright Ideas are showcased on the Ash Center's [Government Innovators Network](#), an online platform for practitioners and policymakers to share innovative public policy solutions.

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About the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation

The Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation advances excellence in governance and strengthens democratic institutions worldwide. Through its research, education, international programs, and government innovations awards, the Center fosters creative and effective government problem solving and serves as a catalyst for addressing many of the most pressing needs of the world's citizens. For more information, visit www.ash.harvard.edu.